

The tail end of a weather alert the other day proclaimed "wicked weather is ahead until 10 p.m. for the Edwards Plateau (shortgrass country)." Sounded like a good chance that the 15 years of drouth might be over at 10 o'clock. For the ones of us hearing the deadline out on the rangelands, staring at the ravages of a dry spring, the relief was immense — as immense as if we'd slipped a noose weighted by Neptune's anchor.

But as is the case in most episodes involving city folks and country folks, the weatherman meant that what he calls "severe thunderstorms" and we campesinos call hard rain, might fall before 10 p.m. Part of his guess also included a chance of a hail storm, and all of our guesses and hopes were that we'd have a flood by 10 p.m.

That was going to be short notice for my outfit. Our long range plan was already set to receive another load of feed for Thursday morning by 10 a.m. predictions were that the amount of feed left in the funnel of the bin on Wednesday afternoon would feed the first run on Thursday morning, unless the alternator on the feed wagon kept undercharging the battery, causing the auger to kick out less feed. Should that be the case, we could go until mid-day without more feed. (Our business is an exact science,

but a slight lag in performance occurs using 27 year-old pickups and 30 year-old homemade self feeders to calculate time and weight.)

A hard shower fell in Mertzon before 10 p.m. One of my compadres over at Angelo reported a bruised face from being caught outdoors in heavy hail, switching his insured town car from the garage to shelter his uninsured ranch pickup from hail stones. Maybe that needs a rerun: He didn't out and out say he was moving the car from the garage to put the pickup indoors. But he sells insurance, and has for over 50 years. He knows to the centimeter the space a one dollar bill displaces in his pocket book pressed flat or folded. He records to memory the serial number of every bill as large as a five he pockets.

And to show how mighty his huge roll of dough grows, he sold out on the best goat market in the 20th century, then leased his ranch at a figure unknown away and apart from the diamond fields on the South African coast. Knowing those facts beforehand possibly slanted my story, as he is not the kind of guy to be poking his head outdoors for hail stones to ricochet off his cheek bones.

One distraction during the month of May was an epidemic of a moth we call "candle bugs" and the Mexican people call *palomitas*. There never is time to look up the

correct name as they keep you busy sweeping and mopping once an onslaught hits. When they don't land to lie in a sullen gray mass, they flutter into the light, flitting back and forth from window sills and leaving a spotted mess only removable by a high-powered sander.

Candle bugs do not pollinate, or do little else except propagate and defecate. Their life spans are short, as under full siege, an average size kitchen floor will yield four dustpans of bodies every 24 hours. Lady over on a big Boer goat operation west of Barnhart, collects dead candle bugs in gallon buckets to feed the goats in her house trap. Sprinkled with ground cinnamon and white cane sugar, she claims the insects make her nannies give more milk. The only drawback is that the goats bed down under her security light every night and are afraid of shadows.

San Angelo being the largest sheep market in the U.S. gives us woolie operators a chance to share our misery. The sheep sales last two days a week now instead of one short sale run. Dried out herders from as far away as Colorado are shipping to Angelo. Hombres in those climes don't have a flowering crop of prickly pear fruit and a wholesome stand of catclaw beans in the offing like we have coming on in the summer. Not much nourishment for an old mountain bred ewe in a pine cone, or a bed of dried pine needles.

I suspect being hit in the forehead by a lug wrench hurts worse than shipping ewes to a 20-cent a pound market from Colorado, bearing a freight bill and a shrink of proportions high enough to rattle the equanimity of a Las Vegas pit man. However, if there was a chance of the wrench landing a glancing blow, the pain might be less than facing an interstate sheep wreck.

Wicked weather is still on, at this writing. No reports have come on amounts of damages from the hail stones, or how the Barnhart goats weathered the cool front full of candle bugs. Wonder how much more dry weather it's going to take for us to give up... www.noelke.org/monte